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SECOND COVID WAVE POSES HIGHER RISKS FOR ECONOMY

Fitch Ratings on Friday said the second wave of infections poses increased risks for India's fragile economic recovery and its banks

BUSINESSES TO TAKE HUGE HIT IF CASES SPIKE

The rating agency expects a moderately worse environment for the Indian banking sector in 2021, but challenges would intensify if rising infections and follow-up measures to contain the virus further affect business and economic activity. Fitch forecasts India's GDP growth at 12.8% for FY22. But the rising pace of infections poses renewed risks to the forecast, it said

CHALLENGING TIMES FOR BANKING SECTOR

- Over 80% of new cases are in six states, which account for 45% of total banking sector loans. Any further disruption in economic activity in these states would hit business sentiment, Fitch said
- Meanwhile, another report by Oxford Economics said India's economy is resilient but the next few months will be critical

MSME

AND RETAIL LOANS ARE MOST AT RISK, ACCORDING TO FITCH RATINGS

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Resort politics back as Assam Oppn candidates flown to Raj

Eighteen from AIUDF and two from Congress brought to Fairmont Hotel in Jaipur to keep them off BJP reach

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kolkata/New Delhi/Patna/Mumbai

APPREHENDING poaching by the BJP, Assam's Congress-led grand alliance of Opposition has moved 20 party candidates to a hotel in Jaipur. Eighteen from minority-based All India United Democratic Front and two from the Congress were sent to Rajasthan in a chartered plane on Friday. They all have been kept in Fairmont Hotel, where Rajasthan Congress MLAs were kept for days after rebellion by party leader Sachin Pilot.

"We have just landed in Rajasthan. The Chief Minister (Ashok Gehlot) is making all arrangements for our stay," one of them said.

Speculations are rife that the remaining Opposition candidates will fly out of Assam soon.

The third and final phase Assam polls were held on April 6 and the results of the keenly-contested elections will be declared on May 2.

Given past experiences, they are not taking any chances. In the last Manipur elections, the Congress had bagged 28 seats compared to the BJP's 22 in the 60-member House but the latter managed to cobble together the numbers — courtesy defections — and form the government.

Congress and AIUDF are components of the 10-party Opposition alliance, which was formed two months ago to oust the BJP from power. Bodoland People's Front (BPF) is another key constituent of the alliance.

Confirming this development, Congress Chief Whip in the Rajasthan Assembly Mahesh Joshi said, "It is now a well-known trend that the BJP tries to indulge in horse-trading. So, the aim is to take measures for protecting our people."

"The possibility of the BJP indulging in dirty tricks and influence our candidates made us take the decision

AIUDF organising secretary Md Aminul Islam

It has become a trend that the BJP tries to break the Congress after losing polls. So, the allies want to take guard

Congress general secretary R S Surjewala

Twenty leaders have come from Assam and we have been asked to take care of them. I don't know how long they will stay here

Congress Chief Whip in Raj Assembly Mahesh Joshi

BUDDHA AND WHAT'S LEFT OF THE CITADEL

BETWEEN the binary of a *ladaku neta* (the war-like Mamata Banerjee) and the PM's fort-destroyer act, complete with taunts and slogans, there's another figure who's also in the contest—quite strangely, in his absence. He is Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

The 77-year-old former West Bengal CM's failing health—especially respiratory trouble in this Covid season—has kept him away from the public stage. All that has come from him by way of intervention in this election season is a statement. He shot a single arrow, talking of "the unravelling of the Singur-Nandigram conspiracy", and the irony of "the conspirators now fighting each other" in the silence of the graveyard.

Ear to the Ground
WEST BENGAL
SANTWANA BHATTACHARYA

Where did he find 'silence' in this deafeningly high-decibel contest? What he refers to is the silence—the lack of any discussion, amidst this very personalised campaign—on what he believes to be the real issue. That is, the derailed industrialisation of Bengal.

His own attempt to reverse that, beginning from Singur-Nandigram, was a dark and fated one: it had cost Buddhadeb his government and led to his ignominious exit from electoral politics. He had even lost the Jadavpur seat to his former chief secretary, Manish Gupta, by a margin of over 16,000 votes. That was in 2011, when Mamata swept into power on what was called a mandate for *paribartan* (change).

Ten years down the line, the BJP is riding on the idea of *asol paribartan* (real change). If that sounds like an echo, there are reasons why it resonates. They are the same reasons from a decade ago. Jobless youth are the most common sight everywhere in the state—even though Bengal's unemployment, if CMIE data is to be believed, is less than that of Haryana, Rajasthan or Bihar. Indeed, at 17.4% as per the CMIE 2020 annual survey, Bengal's unemployment is even less than the national average. But it's nearly double compared to neighbouring Odisha and Assam's 9.6%.

Take the group of youth, all graduates, whiling away their time around a tea stall outside one of Bishnupur's famous terracotta temples. None of them have jobs.

CONTINUED ON: P10

Health workers collect Aadhaar details before taking samples for Covid testing at KSR Railway station, in Bengaluru on Friday | VINOD KUMAR T

STAY INDOORS AFTER 10 PM

WHAT WILL BE ALLOWED

Visit to hospitals for emergency treatment of patients, accompanied by caretakers

Operations of medical and emergency services

Factories/companies working in night shifts; However, employees must reach their place of work before 10 pm and leave after 5 am the next day

Only vehicles carrying essentials, freight, home delivery, e-commerce and unladen vehicles can operate

Travel by bus, train and flight; Passengers can use autos, cabs and other means to travel to/from bus or train stations or airport, but must carry valid tickets P4

K'TAKA 2ND WAVE BATTLE

	APRIL 9	APRIL 8
Cases	7,955	6,570
Deaths	46	36
Recoveries	3,220	2,398

5.88% POSITIVITY RATE (APRIL 9)

SAMPLES TESTED (APRIL 9) 1,35,163

TOTAL VACCINATIONS SO FAR 53,45,480

Remdesivir too in short supply

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mumbai/Jaipur/Bhopal/Bengaluru

AMID states grappling with stretched Covid facilities and vaccine shortage, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot sent an SOS to the Centre regarding vaccine supply on Friday, even as more inoculation centres were shut in Maharashtra, taking their total count to 592. There were also reports of shortage of Remdesivir that is used to treat Covid patients, in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

Seventy-five of the 120 centres across Mumbai, including a jumbo facility in the Bandra Kurla Complex that was inoculating 4,000 people daily, halted vaccinating people on Friday as supply dried up.

"We have been asking the Centre to ramp up the supply, but there is no positive response. To set up a centre, we spend a lot of money on infrastructure and engage many trained people. Shutting down the centres is a big setback to our vaccination drive," said a senior health official in Maharashtra.

In Rajasthan, the vaccine stock will last only two days, Ashok Gehlot said in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and sought immediate supply of 30 lakh doses to ensure smooth continuation of the inoculation drive, particularly during the 'tika utsav' proposed by the PM.

With hospital beds filling up fast and demand for oxygen shooting up, supply is drying up in some states. Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray has already stated that the state is in "dire need" of oxygen of 1,700-2,500 MT oxygen by April-end.

CONTINUED ON: P7

K'taka 3rd highest in Covid insurance claims

RANJANI MADHAVAN @ Bengaluru

KARNATAKA stands third among states, after Maharashtra and Gujarat, in terms of Covid-19 insurance claims from the start of the pandemic until April 1, 2021. Patients in the state have claimed ₹11,36,36,58,040 crore through public and private insurance so far. The figures for Maharashtra and Gujarat are ₹4,345 crore and ₹1,922 crore, respectively.

As per an analysis done by Jeevan Raksha, an initiative of Proxima, supported by Public Health Foundation of India, average Covid-19 claims from some districts are higher than Bengaluru, although the cost of running a hospital in the metropolitan city is significantly higher. This is as per data from the General Insurance Council of India.

Patients in cities like Yadgir, Vijayapura, Belagavi, Chitradurga, Hassan, Kalaburagi, Tumakuru, Bagalkot, Gadag and Shivamogga claimed higher average Covid-19 insurance amounts than those in Bengaluru, which saw average medical insurance claim for Covid-19 at ₹1,42,000. Excluding Gadag, Shivamogga and Bengaluru, all the districts mentioned had a higher average claim amount than the Karnataka average of ₹1,50,000. Bengaluru, in fact, had a lower average claim amount than the pan-India average of ₹1,47,000.

CONTINUED ON: P7

India cross as US Navy does unauthorised drill

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

TWO days after a US Navy conducted an unusual 'navigation operation' through India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off Lakshadweep Islands without prior permission, New Delhi on Friday conveyed its concerns to Washington through diplomatic channels.

On Wednesday, the US Navy had issued a statement saying its warship, USS John Paul Jones (DDG 53), "asserted navigational rights and freedoms 130 nautical miles west of the Lakshadweep Islands, without requesting India's prior consent." According to the US, India's claims on EEZ under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) are inconsistent with international law. While India ratified the UNCLOS in 1982, the US is not a signatory. According to sources, India is examining the event closely. "We have to examine it from the view of the intent and its future implications", said an official.

Student evaluation mode to be decided soon: Govt

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chitradurga

PRIMARY and Secondary Education Minister S Suresh Kumar on Friday said the department will prepare an action plan after Ugadi, for evaluation of students from Classes 6 to 9 and ensure that assessment of some kind is conducted to gauge their knowledge levels. A decision on whether the evaluation will be online or offline will be announced soon after holding a meeting with experts and officials, he said.

Addressing mediapersons in Chitradurga, the minister said that at a recent meeting of parents' associations, members of the government teachers' association, education experts and other stakeholders, it was decided to have evaluation in some format.

The stakeholders had categorically rejected promotion of students without any examination, Suresh Kumar pointed out.

EXPRESS READ

RCB beat MI in nail-biting contest

Chennai: Royal Challengers Bangalore defeated defending champions Mumbai Indians by two wickets in a last-ball thriller in the IPL on Friday. RCB scored 160 in 20 overs to win the match. Mumbai had put 159 for 9 on the board. P19

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